

JACQUES MARQUETTE (1637-1675)

LOUIS JOLLIET (sometimes spelled Joliet) **(1645-1700)**

Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet searched together and found the waters of the Mississippi River. They were the first Europeans to follow the course of the river.

Jacques Marquette (also known as Father Marquette) was a Catholic missionary and explorer. He was born in Laon, France. In 1666 came to Québec, Canada and learned Indian languages. From 1669 to 1671 he worked in missions in Sault Sainte Marie (Michigan) and La Pointe (Wisconsin). Around this time, he first met Louis Jolliet, who was trading with Indians in the same area.

Jolliet was a French-Canadian trader and explorer. Jolliet was born near Québec City and raised in a Jesuit seminary. In 1668 he decided that he didn't want to become a priest and he became a trader with the Indians instead. From 1669 to 1671 Jolliet explored a lot of the Great Lakes region. During that time he became a great map maker, also worked as a fur trader, and met Marquette.

In 1672, Jolliet was named leader of an expedition that would explore the northern part of the Mississippi River the following year. Jolliet asked Father Marquette to be the chaplain of this group. Along with five others, Jolliet and Marquette crossed Lake Michigan, and explored the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, before reaching the Mississippi River. They followed the Mississippi southward past the mouth of the Arkansas River, then returned northward.

After the expedition, Marquette stayed by Lake Michigan and Jolliet returned to Québec. Father Marquette preached among the Illinois Indians until his death in 1675.

On his way back to Québec, when Jolliet was on Lake Michigan, his canoe turned over and all his precious maps and journals of his trips were lost, but he was able to replace most of the information from memory. Later, he explored other parts of Canada, such as Labrador and Hudson Bay. Louis Jolliet died in 1700 at the age of 55.

RENE-ROBERT CAVALIER, SIEUR de LaSALLE (1643 - 1687)

Rene-Robert de LaSalle was important because of his exploration of the Mississippi River in North America. He was the first European to sail down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. He claimed the Mississippi River Basin, which he called the Louisiana Territory, for France. He is sometimes called "the Father of the Louisiana Territory."

He was born in France on November 24, 1643. He went to Jesuit schools. When he was 23, he set sail for Canada, with plans to be a farmer. However, La Salle became interested in fur trading and set up a fur trading post instead.

He became friendly with the Iroquois Indians, and learned from them of a great river which led to a sea. He became convinced that this was the great water route that would lead to Asia and make trading with the Far East easier. He decided he would try to find that trade route.

In 1669 he sold his land and spent two years exploring. He went up the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario, and probably to the Ohio River region after that, though we're not really sure because the records of this part of his trip were lost. We do know that he didn't find what he was looking for and that he returned to Canada.

In 1677 he had grown bored with fur trading and asked Louis XIV for authorization to explore the western parts of New France. France was very interested in taking over more of North America. In 1679-80, LaSalle led a group that explored the Great Lakes and helped to establish French forts in the area.

In 1682, LaSalle traveled down the Illinois River to the Mississippi and continued all the way south to the Gulf of Mexico. On April 9, 1682 La Salle claimed all of the Mississippi River Basin for France. That was an enormous amount of land because it included all the rivers and streams that feed into the Mississippi, and all of the land between. It includes much of the western part of North America. He named this area Louisiana in honor of the king. Later, in 1803, France sold this land to the United States, and that led to the explorations of [Lewis and Clark](#) and then the westward expansion of America.

From 1684 to 1687, LaSalle led an expedition to further explore the southern end of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. This expedition was full of problems. LaSalle didn't get along with other leaders. He became very sick.

Many of his men were unhappy and deserted the expedition. On March 20, 1687 La Salle was assassinated in Texas by three of his own men. It was a sad end for an important explorer.

Henri de Tonti (1649–1704)

aka: Henry de Tonty

Henri de Tonti helped establish the first permanent European settlement in the lower Mississippi River Valley in 1686. It was called the Poste aux Arkansas, or Arkansas Post (Arkansas County). As a result, de Tonti is often called the “father of Arkansas.” Although Italian by birth, de Tonti is associated with French exploration. He received notoriety as an explorer in the Great Lakes Region and Mississippi River Valley with his friend, Rene-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, at a time when the French were establishing trade monopolies in parts of North America to compete with the English and Spanish.

Henri de Tonti was born around 1649 near Gaeta, Italy, to Lorenzo de Tonti and Isabelle di Lietto. The family moved to Paris, France, soon after his birth so that his father could escape being persecuted in an unsuccessful revolt against the Spanish viceroy in Naples. In 1668, while still a youth, de Tonti enlisted in the French army and served as a cadet. Later, he served in the French navy and lost his right hand in a grenade explosion during the Sicilian wars. He substituted a metal hook, over which he wore a glove, thus earning him the nickname, the “Iron Hand.”

De Tonti first came to North America with La Salle in 1678 and was placed in charge of several French forts in the Great Lakes region. In 1682, de Tonti—now a lieutenant—accompanied La Salle on a journey south to explore the Mississippi River Valley region and to help establish alliances with the Native Americans of the area. On this journey, he witnessed ceremonies claiming the land in the lower Mississippi River Valley for the French king, Louis XIV. One of these ceremonies was held at the present-day site of Arkansas Post Memorial in Desha county in the presence of Quapaw Indians. Afterwards, de Tonti received from La Salle a land grant about thirty-five miles from the mouth of the Arkansas River near the Quapaw village of Osotouy in 1682. After exploring the lower Mississippi River Valley with de Tonti by his side, La Salle left for France in order to collect colonists to settle Louisiana. He placed de Tonti at the fur trading post of Fort Saint Louis on the Illinois River in 1683, one of the only western forts to remain open after the French colonial government decided to concentrate their fur trade efforts in Montreal. De Tonti was not pleased with this assignment and sent La Salle letters asking him to return and assist him.

After assuming that he would meet up with La Salle as he ascended the Mississippi River when he returned from France, de Tonti left Fort Saint Louis and headed south in 1686. Instead of meeting La Salle, de Tonti went to Arkansas to establish a trading post. He left behind six Frenchmen to build a trade house and secure a permanent French

settlement, engage the Quapaw in trade, serve as a way station for travelers between the Illinois country and the Gulf of Mexico, and establish a presence in the middle of North America to stop English invasion from the east. De Tonti called himself the feudal lord, or the “Seignor [*sic*] [of] the City of Tonti and the river of Arkansas.” As feudal lord, de Tonti held legal authority over certain cases in his territory, but it is most likely he never held court or even executed many legal decisions.

De Tonti left Arkansas in 1687 but returned several times in the 1690s to review affairs at his trading house. He found the trading post failing economically because it was hard to reach and was burdened with a moratorium that Louis XIV had placed on beaver pelt trade south of Canada. De Tonti had to enforce this royal edict in 1698, making many French hunters and traders angry with him and resulting in further desertion of the post and the area. As a result, it was not until the early 1700s that the French were able to send more settlers over to increase the population of Arkansas Post.

De Tonti did not return to Arkansas Post after the 1690s. Instead, he fought against the English and the Iroquois while helping to conduct treaties with American Indian tribes. In 1688, de Tonti returned to Fort Saint Louis and learned of the death of La Salle. In the 1690s, he traveled to present-day Texas to find the survivors of La Salle’s expedition but left the area after receiving little help from the local American Indian tribes. In the early 1700s, de Tonti was chosen by Pierre Moyne, Sieur d’Iberville, founder of the Louisiana colony, to make peace between the Choctaw and Chickasaw. He served under Iberville’s brother, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, to bring the two nations together as a treaty negotiator. He also led expeditions in the Gulf Coast regions until 1704.

In September of that year, de Tonti contracted yellow fever and died at Old Mobile (present-day Mobile, Alabama). According to local lore, de Tonti’s “remains were laid to everlasting rest in an unknown grave near Mobile River, and not far from the monument erected in 1902 to commemorate the site of old Mobile.”